
BUDGET UNIT BRIEF – FY 2021

Fiscal Services Division

July 1, 2020



Ground Floor, State Capitol Building

Des Moines, Iowa 50319

515.281.3566

Water Trails and Low Head Dam Mitigation Program

Purpose and History

Appropriations are made from the infrastructure budget for the Water Trails and Low Head Dam Mitigation Program administered by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The Program provides grants and funding assistance for local entities, water trail enhancements, and dam mitigation grants to dam owners. During the 2008 Legislative Session, SF 2380 (Water Trails and Low Head Dam Public Hazard Program Act) established the Program and required the DNR to study waterways for recreational purposes and develop a Statewide Plan by January 1, 2010. In addition, the DNR was required to administer the Program once funding was provided. The Statewide Plan presented several information items, including a map inventory of low head dams for publicizing hazards, recommendations for local communities, input from various stakeholders, and guidance and recommendations related to water trail development.

Water Trails and Low Head Dam Projects

The DNR adopted rules that set grant criteria for water trails and low head dams. For water trails development, the State role is to provide guidelines, templates, planning and technical assistance, and enforcement, as well as the water trails development grants. For dam mitigation, the Program focuses on reducing fatalities at traditionally designed dams, reducing recreational hazards, and enhancing aquatic species connectivity. Applications for both are submitted to the DNR and approved by the Natural Resource Commission (NRC). Per rule, the Director of the DNR appoints a Water Trails Advisory Committee that provides expertise to the Scoring Committee for the grants and assists the DNR in planning for the Program. The DNR staff and the Water Trails Advisory Committee review all projects and determine the mix of allocations for water trails development and for dam mitigation.

Local governments and nonprofit entities are eligible to apply for water trail development grants. No local match is required, but cost share is strongly encouraged throughout the selection criteria. As of 2015, there are 916 miles of designated water trails and 794 miles under review. As water trail projects are completed, they may be eligible to become a designated water trail and included in the DNR water trail marketing materials.

Dam owners, including counties, cities, State agencies, cooperatives, and individuals, are eligible to apply for dam mitigation grants. Projects include removing or demolishing low head dams and restoring river flow, creating rock ramps, and altering the height of the dams, as well as improving signage and warnings near low head dams. For projects involving warning signs, supporting structures, and navigational aids, the dam owner provides a 20.0% match. For other low head dam mitigation projects, the owner provides a 50.0% local match.

More Information

DNR – Water Trail Projects:

<http://www.iowadnr.gov/Things-to-Do/Canoeing-Kayaking/Water-Trail-Development>

DNR – Low Head Dams: www.iowadnr.gov/Recreation/CanoeingKayaking/LowHeadDams.aspx

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State Funding

Between FY 2008 and FY 2016, funding available for the Program from appropriations totaled \$7.0 million, averaging \$889,000 annually for those years. With the exception of a single year, funding was provided by the Rebuild Iowa Infrastructure Fund (RIIF). In previous years, the NRC has transferred funds from other programs for this purpose.

Related Statutes and Administrative Rules

Iowa Code section [464A.11](#)
Iowa Administrative Code [571—30](#)

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